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ABSTRACT

As part of a larger study of systemic educational reform in rural Alaska, this case study examined the implementation of the Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) improvement process in Klawock. Klawock is a town of about 750 Tlingit and non-Native residents on Prince of Wales Island in far southeastern Alaska with a K-12 school that serves 212 students. AOTE intends to bring community involvement, a focus on student learning, and a systemic approach to educational reform in rural Alaska Native communities; however, in Klawock, AOTE was weakly implemented. An AOTE leadership team was never formed, and the process was carried out by two local facilitators and the superintendent. The superintendent was working from a strategic plan developed in the early 1990s and used AOTE to secure community endorsement for this plan rather than to elicit community voice and set a new direction. After five meetings with little community attendance, AOTE faded away midway into its second year. The AOTE process was hindered by the school's unwillingness to share decision-making power with the community, by poor communication, and by a lack of desire among parents and community to take a more active role. AOTE was also contending with a context of competing reforms. This case study demonstrates that increasing community voice is more than a mechanical process and must include the underlying dynamics of trust, communication, understanding, and accountability. This report includes results of parent involvement and student surveys, vignettes from two successful school programs, academic achievement data, an outline of the AOTE process, and the survey instruments. (SV)

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KLAWOCK CITY SCHOOLS

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IT TAKES MORE THAN GOOD INTENTIONS TO BUILD A PARTNERSHIP: KLAWOCK CITY SCHOOLS

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There are two ways to reach Klawock on Prince of Wales Island in far southeastern Alaska. The slow, restful ferry ride from Ketchikan is the preferred mode of travel for many island residents. Ironically, the ferry can run under most weather conditions even though its schedule is practically nonexistent during the harsh winter months. The second alternative is a 50-mile airplane ride that can be bumpy and nerve-wracking as the small plane threads through a narrow valley to reach Klawock on the far side of the island. On my first plane ride over, I felt as if I had never left Oregon as we flew into a wet, temperate winter climate rather than the extremes of more northern Alaska. The view from the air was all too familiar: the beauty of ancient waterways and coniferous forests peppered by tracts of clear-cut, denuded land. During my three visits, I encountered friendly people who didn't worry about locking doors and offered a stranger their car keys so he could get around and see what was happening with education in Klawock.

Klawock is a center of Tlingit Indian culture on the island. The town gets its name from the Tlingit settler named Lawaa, who led the first settlement party into the area. The name went through several spellings and pronunciations before becoming the more Americanized version, Klawock (Jon Rowan, personal communication, 1999). Today Klawock is a mixed Tlingit and white community. An important city landmark is the Totem Park, which displays many restored and replica totem poles from the old village. The park is next to the school's Native Arts Center and is a symbol of the area's heritage. Through a school-city partnership, an Alaska Native teacher and his high-school students are working to restore the weather-worn totem poles as part of the school's Native arts curriculum. Despite a jobs economy, subsistence activity is still very important on the island for both Native and non-Native residents.

The incorporated city of Klawock has about 750 people who live in a mix of old and new housing. There are signs of both old poverty and new growth. Since the late 1800s, Klawock has grown from a trading post to a center for salmon fishing and canning (including the first cannery in Alaska) to a logging town. There is still a salmon hatchery that is an important landmark and a site of learning for some high-school science classes. The community and city government face some new financial problems because of a downturn in commercial fishing and timber production. Tax revenues are inadequate (there are no property taxes), and city services need to be trimmed. Klawock is also seeing increasing competition from its neighboring town of Craig, which has a bigger harbor and is the center of island commerce.

You can find many amenities in Klawock not available in more isolated Alaska communities, such as paved roads, several restaurants, a large grocery store with a fast-food deli, hardware and craft stores, a gas station, and a fishing lodge. The town also has a Native health clinic, the Klawock Heenya Native Corporation, and three churches. Klawock is becoming more "uptown" in the opinion of some residents, as evidenced by a new mini-mall and the beginnings of a new housing subdivision. Yet in the older part of the town on the Klawock Inlet, there are many dilapidated and abandoned structures. The Klawock City School District is located in this older part of town on the waterfront.

The Klawock City School District is a one-school district only seven miles away from another single-town district in Craig. The school opened its doors in 1948 and today is housed in a series of old and new buildings. The elementary grades are in one wing connected to the library/high-school complex. Middle-school students reside in several portables a short distance away, and the Native Arts Center is in another out-building on the other side of the grounds next to the Totem Park. All students share a common gymnasium, lunch room, and library. The superintendent's office adjoins the library and the principal is closer to the elementary school. As in other single-site and small Alaska districts, the superintendent *is* the central office and plays many roles, including special education director, staff development director, grant writer, etc. Most of the teaching staff in Klawock is white, and teacher turnover is low, the low turnover being an unusual characteristic in rural Alaska. A large cohort of teachers who arrived at

the school about 12 years ago remains there, and teachers talked about the strong friendships and camaraderie that have developed over the years.

In 1996–97, the combined grades K–12 totaled 212 students, with a ratio of about 55% Alaska Native to 45% white students. About one-quarter of students were from low-income families, 10% classified as bilingual, and 25% in special education. As rural Alaska schools go, Klawock is neither an extremely high poverty site nor one marked by extremely low test scores (standardized test results are presented later in this case study). The 20 or so students I personally talked to agreed that their school and community were safe, tight-knit, and caring places. Kids (and many adults) in Klawock care about sports as much as academics, and the prominently displayed trophies, the school newspaper, and even the school board meeting minutes pointed to a strong sports culture. Some teachers reported a growing drug problem on the fringes of campus and continuing problems of alcoholism in the community. At the school itself, there were no visible signs of graffiti, gangs, or serious behavior problems in hallways and classrooms. All in all, Klawock seemed like a good place, exhibiting many of the advantages of a small school in a small, stable community.

Klawock participated in AOTE training for two years in order to begin building a partnership between school and community that would ultimately lead to greater student success. In comparison to other study sites, Klawock is marked by less poverty and higher academic achievement than other remote Alaska villages. Still, it has been working at school improvement for some years and deals with a number of student risk factors, including poverty, a culturally-mixed community, and an unusually high percentage of special-needs students.

This case study describes what happened before and during the implementation of AOTE, why it happened, and what the results mean for forging partnerships and achieving student results in small rural Alaska communities like Klawock. I hope this case offers reformers, school personnel, and community members (both inside and outside of Klawock) some practical learnings and deeper thinking about changing how schools and communities must work together to benefit all students. This case study was a group effort. I must acknowledge the fine work of our case study team, which included Rob Steward, school counselor and teacher; Donna Jackson, parent; Ann Janes, teacher;

and the occasional help of high-school students Windy, Yodean, and Rachel. As a team, we planned the data collection, collected data, and together discussed the results and what they mean. This participatory approach has strengthened the study and we hope leads to a more accurate and thorough analysis. As sole author, however, I take responsibility for the final words and analysis presented here. More detail about the case study methods and data sources is presented in Appendix B.

On the Road to Reform

This story begins with an account of AOTE in relation to the other school reforms that Klawock had been engaged in. The AOTE process begins with setting a clear, agreed-upon direction for student learning. Forging a unifying vision of student learning was not a new activity in Klawock when AOTE began in fall 1996. The superintendent, Morris Ververs, was an advocate and practitioner of strategic planning and had guided his district through a three-year process to develop a mission statement, a set of beliefs about student learning, and six student "exit outcomes" (learning goals). This mission and goals, developed between 1991 and 1993, appeared annually in the district's Strategic Plan of Service (SPOS) and were prominent in the school's annual Report Card to its community. (Exhibit 1 in Appendix A shows the pre-AOTE district mission and goals.)

The SPOS document was a forward-sounding statement about quality education that proposed 21st century learning goals for students. Among its guiding principles and values, the plan talked about the importance of student engagement and the need for cooperation between school and community. This was a well-crafted statement that the strategic planning committee–a group of 20 or so school and community people–undoubtedly put some effort into. Yet in the views of most school and community people whom I interviewed, the mission, goals, and SPOS were little more than words on paper. At best, the words were laudable but at the same time tangential to teachers as they went about their daily work. At worst, the mission and goals evoked a cynicism that one teacher expressed as "I wish we would actually do the things we put down on paper!" Many parents viewed the mission and goals as little more than nice words that had been developed with little community voice. This was the context in which AOTE began.

Bringing more community involvement into this strategic planning process was the clear motivation for AOTE as articulated by the superintendent and as reflected in school board minutes and various improvement documents. The existing mission and goals, even if acceptable to the community, needed a broader endorsement. Many teachers and parents interviewed perceived low levels of community input and buy-in over the three years of strategic planning, some characterizing the strategic planning committee as "cheerleaders" hand picked by the superintendent rather than the voice of the community. AOTE could provide the missing link to the community as strategic planning continued under Morris' direction. Some reform-minded parents who saw strategic planning as a "superintendent's thing" hoped that AOTE might be the first real spark of a school/community partnership.

The Programmatic Approach to School Reform

Many school and community people in Klawock seemed more reform-weary than reform-ready as AOTE began. This was easy to understand. A noteworthy feature of Klawock was the many "programs" and seemingly unconnected initiatives that dotted the reform landscape. This is probably very typical of Alaska communities and even non-Alaska communities, but it is an important context feature for understanding AOTE vis-a-vis the bigger picture of educational reform.

As a research team, we tried to map the major activities aimed at "improving the learning and experiences of students" over the past five years. A spider web of initiatives and loosely connected programs resulted. There were both large and small things on our map. One category was the "programs" that had been tried and sometimes abandoned over the past five years to bring about more whole-school change, including strategic planning workshops, Successful Schools (a process similar to Onward to Excellence), and outcomes-based education. In the map, AOTE was connected to this group of reform efforts as well as to "parent involvement." There was another group of efforts related to the Alaska Quality Schools initiative, including curriculum alignment, Goals 2000 grants, parent involvement training, and raising graduation standards.

At its outset, people viewed AOTE as something both old and new. To some extent, it was only the next chapter in the superintendent-led strategic planning process. People had a sense, however, that AOTE would focus more on community involvement than past initiatives. Morris clearly characterized AOTE as a process of gathering community input to reinvigorate and fine-tune the existing strategic plan. He described his expectations for AOTE as: "We're hoping for a reaffirmation of what we already have, reaffirm the old beliefs and [student] outcomes." This mindset clearly influenced how AOTE was implemented, as shown later in this section.

Beyond the programmatic reforms, our map showed other things perhaps as important or more important to the small group of teachers, students, and community members constructing it. For one of the teachers, a highly important change was placing telephones in every classroom so that teachers and parents can regularly communicate. For the students, the real action was going on in their high-school English class, where Real Communication was seen as engaging, meaningful coursework to build important real-life skills in writing and speaking. Real Communication was a grassroots effort of an English teacher, other teachers in the department, and Morris even before Alaska set new higher standards for writing and communication. Another reform that both adults and students agreed was important was the Native Arts Program. This was both a symbol of partnership between the school and city government and provided the best example of hands-on, cultural learning. (Real Communications and the Native Arts Program are illustrated in Exhibits 2 and 3 in Appendix A).

The mapping exercise by our small research team was an eye-opener. AOTE was but one little "bubble" in a complicated network of grassroots, superintendent-led, and mandated efforts to improve student learning. As I talked more with to teachers and parents, a view of fragmented school reform was reinforced. It was hard for teachers to keep the reform titles straight or see many connections. In many ways, Klawock was a good candidate for AOTE if in fact the process could bring more unity and clearer direction to improving student learning, with the support and partnership of parents and other community members. Some of the positive preconditions for AOTE included a reform-minded superintendent, an expressed desire by school and community people to increase community involvement, and a flurry of programmatic reforms in need of some

sorting and unification towards more systemic, whole-school change. In summary, the practical challenges of AOTE in Klawock would be to (a) actualize the greater community voice and involvement that everyone thought was important, and (b) unify many fragmented improvement efforts under one umbrella with a clear direction.

AOTE Implementation: Fall 1996–Spring 1998

Against this five-year backdrop of strategic planning and school improvement, AOTE was implemented as a conscious effort to reignite the strategic planning work and infuse it with more parent and community involvement. The two key players in the implementation of AOTE were Cindy and Jon. Cindy was an activist community member who later was elected to the school board. Jon was a founder and instructor for the Native Arts Program who was working on his teaching certificate. Jon Rowan and Cindy Armour were chosen as the AOTE facilitators. Both had strong roots in the community and both were Alaska Natives. A research/case study team was also formed as part of the AOTE process. The membership of this team changed somewhat during the two years. Rob, Ann, and Donna (two teachers and an Alaska Native parent) ended up as the core team, with three students serving as helpers. They not only attended AOTE research team training workshops in Juneau but worked as Klawock's on-site case study team under my supervision.

Klawock was in the third wave of districts that have adopted AOTE since 1992. In this training modality, the two co-facilitators attended workshops in Juneau to learn the process, along with local facilitators from other Southeast districts. Jon and Cindy were expected to learn the process in Juneau and then teach and guide their district/village leadership team back home to implement AOTE. The two-year, six-workshop training process consisted of (a) setting direction, (b) choosing village priorities, (c) beginning an action plan (end of year 1), (d) finishing the action plan, (e) implementing and monitoring the improvement plan, and (f) renewal/planning for the future (end of year 2). The major vehicle for eliciting community voice and participation throughout the whole process was a series of up to nine structured community meetings over two years. The meetings were supposed to be run by the leadership team with "behind the scenes" help from the local

facilitators. (Exhibit 4 in Appendix A presents a synopsis of the two-year AOTE training process for Klawock.)

Facilitator training began in September 1996, and by November the first community meeting was held in Klawock, followed by a second meeting in December and a third in February 1997. Each of these meetings was attended by about 20 or so school and community people. For the third meeting (which the case study team attended and observed), 5 of the 22 participants were community members (including three parents, one elder, and one business person) and 9 were students. The meetings were held in the early afternoon at a Native community center. Some people were concerned that afternoon meetings might keep working parents away. These were the only three meetings held during the 1996–97 school year even though the expectation was for six meetings in order to reach the beginning phases of "action planning."

The way these meetings were run speaks to some early misunderstandings about AOTE. Most importantly, the meetings were conducted in the absence of a leadership team, which was never formed. A broad-based leadership team is a key structure in the AOTE process that is supposed to (a) involve representatives from all key stakeholder groups (staff, parents, elders, board members, students), (b) provide a mechanism for increasing community voice, and (c) make AOTE sustainable by building community leadership capacity early on. In other words, "leadership" does not mean a superintendent, school principal, or other school leader running the process. Shared leadership that includes community, staff, and even student voices is the expectation. In Klawock, Cindy and Jon had to implement the process alone. Morris seemed reluctant to form an AOTE leadership team, stating that a leadership team was already in place–the old strategic planning group. Yet beyond an initial planning meeting that some of these people attended, they did not actively participate in AOTE.

Even more problematic was that Cindy and Jon seemed to work under the close supervision of Morris in conducting the community meetings. Each of the first-year meetings started with a presentation by Morris of the Strategic Plan of Service, how AOTE was an extension of this work, and sometimes other reform efforts like Alaska Quality Schools. Rather than starting the meetings from the "bottom-up" with activities designed to elicit community-valued goals and build trust, the meetings were started from

the "top-down," and the clear message was given that AOTE was an extension of old school-led reforms.

The case study team conducted structured interviews with 6 of the 22 participants at the third meeting. These folks gave the meeting an overall positive evaluation and talked about the lively discussion between students and adults, but there were concerns about low community turnout. One person warned, "We are preaching to the choir." In a further interview, one of the facilitators expressed a keen disappointment about the way AOTE proceeded during the first year, pointing out how it had quickly become a "school thing." During one meeting this facilitator felt that an important elder should have been encouraged to participate, but Morris vetoed this idea, according to the facilitator. Morris was retiring at the end of the school year and Klawock's principal, Tim MacDonald, would become the new superintendent. There was optimism as the first year ended that Tim would be more open to genuine community involvement and would at least not carry the baggage of the old strategic plan. The hope was that AOTE would hit its stride during its second year of implementation.

In its second year, the AOTE process took off with a great start and then lagged. There was an effort to get going early and make up for lost time as community meetings #4 and #5 were held in rapid succession in late October and early November 1997. Although there was still no leadership team, Cindy and Jon led the meetings without Morris, and AOTE was starting to move out of the shadow of the old strategic plan. Tim took more of a back-seat role, believing that AOTE—as a means to community involvement—needed to be led by people like Cindy and Jon to have credibility. These meetings were once again observed by the case study team. They were much more focused on setting a new direction for student learning and followed the AOTE process of engaging all participants through small group activities. For those present, there were engaging discussions between students and adults about visions of student success. Meetings were held in the early evening to encourage parent attendance, but attendance was down from 20 people during the first year to about a dozen, with very few parent and community participants. The facilitators stuck to their planned agendas and ended the fourth meeting with a group consensus on the student goal of engendering a "strong work ethic" among Klawock students. Each attendee said they would try to round up three new

people to attend the next meeting, but attendance remained at about a dozen people (with one or two community members) through meeting #5. Despite the poor turnout, the fifth meeting also went smoothly and people felt good about the "work ethic" goal, but it was clear to everyone that this goal in no way represented a broad community voice. The community never really showed up. Jon (the AOTE facilitator) commented that there are meetings nearly every night of the week in Klawock of various community groups, and the poor attendance at AOTE meetings was perhaps a function of people being "meetinged out."

A sixth community meeting was tentatively planned for early December, but it didn't materialize. Several attempts were made before Christmas and through early winter to identify school and community people to sit on a leadership team. Jon and Cindy had identified some teacher volunteers and a few interested community members during the fall meetings. But the community members didn't commit in the end (it was reported that at least some had left Klawock). As inertia and disappointment set in, Jon and Cindy both became busy with other activities—both are very active in church groups, Native organizations, and other community affairs—and lost touch with each other through the winter and early spring months. By spring 1998, the AOTE process seemed to be dead. There were some discussions and efforts between the AOTE trainer in Juneau and the superintendent to keep it alive, but neither a leadership team nor any further meetings happened.

As this case study is written, another district leadership change will occur next fall with the resignation of Tim as superintendent. A new superintendent has been chosen, but it is unknown how the new superintendent views AOTE or whether this was even a consideration in his selection.

Reflections and Conclusions About AOTE and Systemic Reform

For some, AOTE was the hope for new energy and new people to work on an ongoing strategic planning process that had low credibility with many community members and teachers. Despite the positive expectations, good intentions, and hard work, at least among a small number of people, AOTE followed the fate of other schoolwide

improvement efforts in Klawock (like outcomes-based education and Successful Schools) that had come and gone. AOTE is conceptualized as a more systemic, long-term change process, but in Klawock it seemed to become more "programmatic" improvement. The way AOTE was implemented reinforced old ways of doing business (top-down strategic planning) rather than a new partnership model of school reform. An important question is: Why did people fail to see AOTE as a new approach or paradigm to school improvement? Why were things done in the same old way? Several possible explanations are offered.

The message of AOTE being a more systemic, community-based approach may not have filtered through the training, particularly when only two facilitators attended the training sessions. Or maybe people weren't ready for deeper changes despite the expressed intentions about wanting more "community involvement." Another important factor is that AOTE seemed to be competing for time and resources with more high-stakes reforms like the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. For example, the time and effort put into AOTE over two years paled in comparison to approximately 12 staff development days required by the district of all teachers to attend workshops to align the math and language arts curriculum to state standards.

While AOTE did not take, this should not be viewed as Klawock giving up on educational improvement. As pointed out earlier, incremental changes like the Native Arts program, the Real Communications curriculum, inclusion for special needs students, and even telephones in the classroom show that there are dedicated educators and an improvement spirit in Klawock. During the second year of AOTE, Tim took on the issue of high absenteeism due to sports travel and proposed a four-day school schedule that would significantly reduce student athletes missing 20 or more school days per year because of their off-island games. These absences cause disruptions in the academic program for all students as teachers make adjustments for large numbers of absentee students. Despite two community meetings (which were well attended) to sell the proposal, the plan did not receive enough community support to be carried forward. It was opposed by a strong and vocal group of parents who rounded up others to support their position and killed the proposal at the second meeting.

What if there had actually been a strong community commitment to a goal like "student work ethic," which emerged from the handful of people at the last AOTE community meeting? Could this have provided the argument and support for a four-day school schedule and more academic time? AOTE was not able to foster this kind of school-community unity of purpose during its two-year try in Klawock. Of course implementation of the process was weak. But what factors help explain the weak implementation? Three explanations are offered: (a) a reluctance of the school administration to open up the reform agenda to the community; (b) poor communication about AOTE, resulting in a lack of awareness and understanding; and (c) the community perhaps not wanting more voice in educational affairs.

As best exemplified by Morris' actions and mindset, there was an issue of who controls the reform agenda. AOTE became the "superintendent's thing" during the first year and perhaps could not overcome this reputation even when there was something of a change with Tim in the second year. Tim expressed support for AOTE and, like Morris, talked about the importance of "community involvement." Yet almost opposite to Morris, he seemed to take a stance of noninvolvement. Obviously, superintendent or principal leadership that both genuinely supports the concept of community voice and takes an active role without "taking over" is essential. The reluctance to form a leadership team most clearly shows an unwillingness to share the reform agenda with the community.

Communication about AOTE was weak and episodic. There were some short newsletter items and announcements about AOTE and its community meetings in the school newsletter, community newspaper, and local cable access channel. But there was not much to really explain how AOTE differed from past "programs" and not enough people (beyond the two facilitators) who really understood its fundamental concepts. There also seemed little in the way of important personal communications in a community like Klawock that is small, tight-knit, and has extensive family networks.

Finally, an explanation that has merit is that the community did not want more voice in educational matters. The community was not necessarily comfortable with a formal partnership with school staff, or else they simply didn't feel the need. Some parents reported isolated complaints about their own children, but chose to work through

personal networks (individual school board members, teachers, school administrators, and sometimes outside advocates) to have their complaints dealt with. As one Native community member expressed, "We are an independent people and have our own way of doing things." One explanation offered is that most people were basically satisfied with education in Klawock. This might have sounded like an excuse if only heard from school administrators, but the argument was given merit by some community people too. A parent survey discussed in the next section also sheds light on what kinds of educational roles parents saw for themselves. Parents did not see a strong role for themselves as school decision makers or participants in AOTE, and teachers did not strongly endorse these kinds of new roles for parents.

Understanding Community Voice and Participation

As already documented, AOTE was weakly implemented in Klawock, so Klawock does not provide a good test of how a well-executed AOTE effort creates and sustains community voice. This story might have been quite different in Klawock if there had been a greater effort to share leadership, stronger follow through of AOTE activities, and perhaps a community more compelled to participate. But as we look for clues about why AOTE was not well implemented and because there was great interest in the topic of parent involvement during the data collection, this case can teach us something about community voice. The areas we studied most extensively in Klawock were shared decision making and parent involvement in schooling.

"I Don't Know How I Am Supposed to Have a Voice"

These words, spoken by a Klawock parent who was quite active in her community and certainly concerned about her son succeeding in school, pinpoint a central dilemma about community voice as it was observed in Klawock. Everyone agrees with the concept but no one knows how to make it happen. It is also unclear whether people really want it to happen, because increased community voice means significantly different roles and relationships for school staff and parents.

When I began the case study interviews, the topic of parent involvement quickly surfaced. As discussed earlier, AOTE was all about increasing parent and community involvement. There were allusions to this in school board minutes, the written strategic plan, and other places. Parent involvement was on a lot of people's minds. But the initial round of interviews revealed dilemmas and confusion. There was no one view of what parent involvement meant, even within a particular group. For example, some teachers wanted more parent volunteers in their classrooms and some didn't really want parents around, believing that their primary role is as the educator is in the home. Some teachers felt frustrated because they were making efforts to reach out to parents and receiving no response. On the other hand, some parents felt frustrated, believing that school personnel could be very insensitive when specific concerns were raised about their children's schooling. The PTSA was in many ways strong—sponsoring a variety of school activities for parents and raising a significant sum of money to buy books for the library—but its president felt that increasing parent involvement was often a frustrating task. Both teachers and parents were concerned about perceived barriers for Native parents, including a discomfort in coming to the school and different cultural styles between Native parents and white teachers. Yet in all this confusion, what most school and community people agreed on was that parent involvement was a good thing and that Klawock needed more of it to help provide the best education for its children.

Klawock seemed to be caught in what Joyce Epstein (1995) calls the "rhetoric rut." People on both sides support the idea of parent involvement yet feel confused and paralyzed. Everyone endorses the concept, but taking action is difficult. Klawock was stuck in a mode where teachers and parents seemed to operate as two "separate spheres of influence" (Epstein, 1995). This idea was expressed succinctly by one parent who noted that "There is a parent domain and a teacher domain and the two don't cross." A stronger statement by another parent was: "They make us feel like we owe them." This parent felt that some teachers (but not all) carried an attitude that goes something like: "We work hard to educate your children so please don't question what we do." It is important to point out that such parent attitudes are not necessarily a majority opinion. These negative statements were balanced by positive statements about teachers who go out of their way to help students. But the point here is that Klawock struggles with the issue of

parent involvement. It is probably not unlike many other communities that say they want to build partnerships and find it more difficult than expected. Some of the further data we collected—including a parent survey and further in-depth interviews—sheds light on the barriers and how to overcome them.

The Parent Involvement Survey

Our case study team designed a short questionnaire to dig deeper into the issue. It was mailed out to all families, and 22 parents responded. In a second stage, we randomly selected families, and Donna (the parent on the team) conducted 18 more in-person questionnaires (with the help of a student research team member) to supplement our mail survey, bringing our sample up to 40 parents. This represented about one-third of the district's families, with both Native and non-Native parents represented. A parallel teacher survey was given to all teachers at a staff meeting, and 13 were completed, representing most of the K–12 staff. (The questionnaires are presented in Appendix B.)

We based one set of items on Epstein's (1995) framework of parent involvement. We asked parents and teachers to rate the importance of 12 specific parent involvement activities in 5 of Epstein's categories:

1. Parenting (help families establish home environments that support learning)
2. Communicating (effective school-to-home and home-to-school information sharing)
3. Volunteering (parents helping in classrooms and the school)
4. Teaching at home (helping parents guide children through homework and projects)
5. Decision making (include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders)

Parent and teacher views of these categories provided important information about parents' role conceptions of a parent's role. Views of the parent's role in education very likely shape the decisions that parents make about their own involvement and the encouragement that teachers give to parents (see Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Not surprisingly, our results showed that parents and teachers ascribed at least some importance to all five categories. More telling, however, was what they rated as "very important" activities; that is, the activities that parents would likely find the time for and

that teachers would actively encourage. Figure 1 presents the parent and teacher ratings of "very important" activities, rank-ordered based on the parent percentages.

Our team noted a number of trends in the results. Nearly all parents saw their major role as supporting their children's education at home by monitoring school work and homework, reading to their children or encouraging them to read, and working at home on school projects. Parents also felt that parent/teacher conferences are an important communication activity. Teachers tended to agree here with parents. Next were activities where parents and teachers ascribed less importance to the parent role: understanding and supporting the school's educational program and mission/goals and attending PTSA sponsored meetings or parenting classes. There were some parent-teacher differences here as shown in Figure 1. Finally, and most important for a process like AOTE, both parties agreed that some activities are far less important: parent involvement in school planning and decision making (including AOTE meetings) and volunteering in the classroom or school. Only a minority of parents and teachers viewed these activities as "very important" in the larger scheme of things.

Figure 1
What Parents and Teachers Regard as "Very Important" Parent Involvement Activities

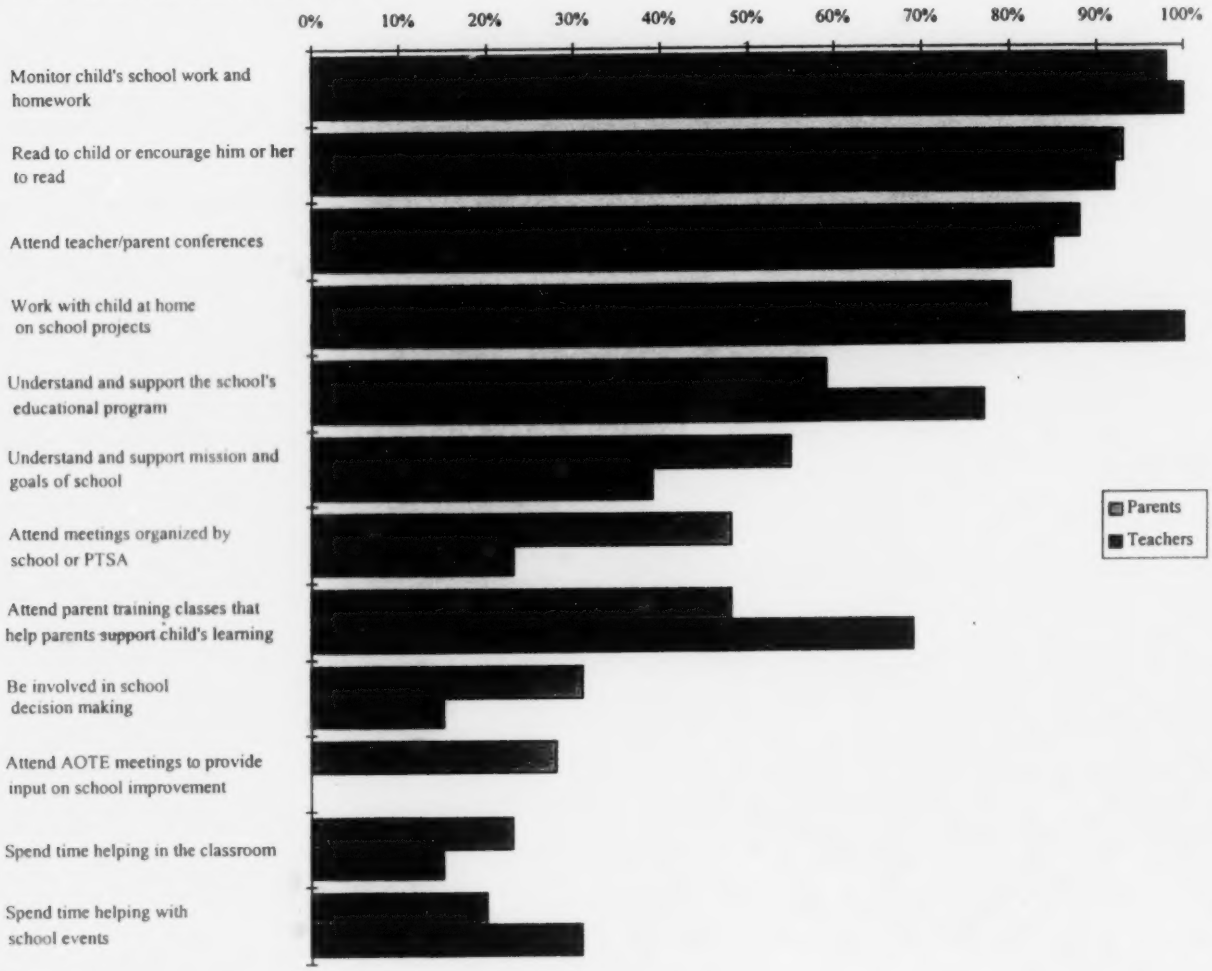
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Monitor child's school work and homework
Read to child or encourage him or her to read
Attend teacher/parent conferences
Work with child at home on school projects
Understand and support the school's educational program
Understand and support mission and goals of school
Attend meetings organized by school or PTSA
Attend parent training classes that help parents support child's learning
Be involved in school decision making
Attend AOTE meetings to provide input on school improvement
Spend time helping in the classroom
Spend time helping with school events
Parents
Teachers

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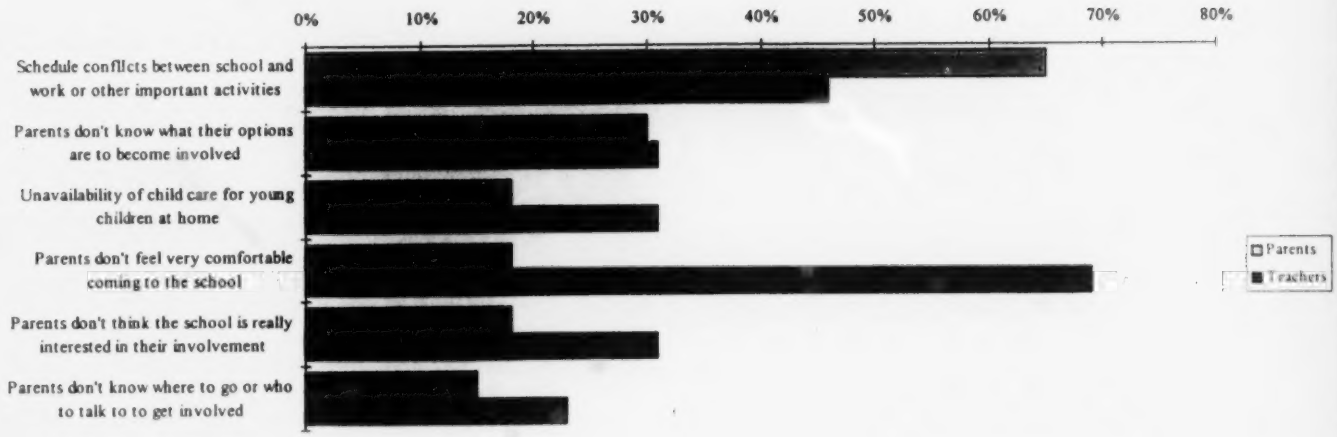
Figure 2
Factors That Prevent More Parent Involvement


0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
Schedule conflicts between school and work or other important activities
Parents don't know what their options are to become involved
Unavailability of child care for young children at home
Parents don't feel very comfortable coming to the school
Parents don't think the school is really interested in their involvement
Parents don't know where to go or who to talk to to get involved
Parents
Teachers

We also asked parents if they were involved as much as they would like to be and 70% answered "yes." We asked parents and teachers to consider a number of factors that might hinder parent involvement. The results are presented in Figure 2, again rank-ordered by the parent percentages. Not surprisingly, the most inhibiting factor for parents was time and scheduling—this item was checked by nearly two-thirds of the parents (the majority of our respondents were "working" rather than "at-home" parents). But beyond the time issue, an important inhibiting factor for many was that they didn't know what their options were to become more involved in the school. This mirrors the earlier parent concern, "I don't know how I am supposed to have a voice." Interestingly, teachers cited the most inhibiting factor as parents not feeling comfortable coming to the school. What teachers see as "discomfort" may be parents not knowing what their options are. Our case study team drew the following conclusions from the survey:

- Parents are busy and need many parent involvement options to fit their schedules—both varied times of the day and week and varied activities to pique different interests and concerns. Yet most parents say they are involved as much as they want to be, so outreach activities alone may only accomplish so much.
- Teachers and parents alike see the primary parent role as helping educate children in the home and supporting what goes on in the classroom. Only a minority of parents see a strong role for themselves as classroom volunteers or as participants in school decision making and school improvement, a view which is reinforced by teachers.

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- The parents who responded to the survey feel comfortable coming to the school and believe that the staff wants them to be involved. While parents may feel comfortable, they aren't sure what the expectations or options are for their involvement.
- Communication between home and school is one area where people see a need for improvement.

The larger challenge to increasing parent involvement and community voice in Klawock may be to convince parents *and* teachers that parents have many important roles to play as educational partners. Right now, both groups see the parent role as being good parents and promoting learning at home, which is a very important role. But absent are conceptions of more expanded parent roles that characterize partnerships—as school volunteers, decision makers, and active participants in improvement work. The survey results show a low level of importance ascribed to AOTE community meetings. Parents attending AOTE meetings was viewed as "very important" by only 28% of the parents and surprisingly, by none of the teachers. This helps explain some of the findings about poor community meeting turnout. These results make the case that the school and community may not have been ready for shared decision making and greater community voice, despite the choice to implement AOTE.

The parent survey results were analyzed by race to see if there were differences between white and Native parents. All of the analyses revealed similar views and opinions across racial groups. Native parents felt just as comfortable coming to the school as non-Native parents, and if anything were less likely to endorse the statement, "I don't think the school is interested in my involvement." Native and non-Native parents also had similar patterns of their role conceptions—more as good parents supporting education in the home than as classroom volunteers or school decision makers.

What About Hard to Reach Parents?

The parent survey provides important information about community voice. It is not necessarily the whole story, however. One of my in-depth interviews with a Native parent stood out because it revealed some important dynamics about "hard to reach" parents who feel alienated from the school for a variety of reasons. In rural Alaska communities, parents can feel marginalized because of poverty, a sense of cultural differences between themselves and teachers, or because of their own negative school experiences as children. The two lengthy interviews I conducted with "Bill" (a pseudonym) represent only one voice in Klawock, yet this voice reveals some important underlying dynamics for Native parents. Bill was as concerned as any good parent about his children's education and at the same time reticent to become more involved in education, both at home and certainly with the school. He seemed successful at his trade yet he felt little efficacy as a parent educator because of his own lack of a good formal education. He also seemed to have given up on the school system, perhaps with good cause.

Bill is an Alaska Native who was born in a nearby town. His own experience in school many years ago was quite miserable. He described his boyhood school as a place where 90% of the teachers didn't care if the students passed or not. They just wanted to pass students through. He had done quite well, however, and now lived in a comfortable home in Klawock out of which he ran a small business. The living room we sat in was well furnished with warm colors and comfortable chairs and displayed many Western and Alaska Native artifacts along with a television set, computer, and fax machine.

We began discussing parent and community involvement, and Bill said that it is not as easy as it sounds, especially for Alaska Native parents. A lot of parents do not know how to become involved—they don't understand what the teachers are doing. Bill felt that he could not help his daughter with her middle-school math since he only had a ninth-grade education himself. Further, he firmly believed that it is not the parent's role to teach academic subjects: "I run my business. I'm not a teacher. I can't come into the school and teach math!" I asked, "But you must use math in your work. Could you come in and talk to the kids about how math is used in the real world?" He didn't really

have an answer. He was firm that it was the teacher's job to teach, and teachers should be doing their jobs. Bill was divorced and raising two children while running his business. He talked about his two children having very different experiences in the Klawock school. His daughter, "Anita," was 13 and in seventh grade and his son, "Sam," was 11 and a special education student. I asked him in thinking about his experiences with his own children, "Is the school serious when they talk about wanting parent involvement?" His answer was a resounding "NO."

He was very disturbed about Sam and special education. Sam is in the regular classroom and what Bill sees is that the teacher ". . . just gives him five problems to work on while the other kids get 20 problems." The other kids learn more and Sam falls further behind. Bill thinks a lot of parents with special education students feel this way but nobody wants to step forward. Bill went to the school and talked to many people about Sam's problems: teacher, principal, superintendent, and finally the school board. But the response he received was not very satisfying: "I go down there, I tell them what's on my mind, I get no response; then I get angry and communication shuts down. They say this is the policy. Period!" He was very concerned about Sam, so he called a child advocate who intervened. This resulted in Sam receiving additional tutoring by a high-school student.

I asked, "Why do you think it is like this?" The only answer that came to his mind was cultural style differences. He felt that white parents are more "aggressive" than Native parents as a matter of cultural style, and the school is more likely to listen to them. But he added that he shouldn't have to be "pushy" to get what his children deserve. I asked, "What can the school do to make Native parents more welcome?" He really didn't know. He just felt frustrated.

Bill's story about his daughter Anita was much more positive. Three years ago, they were living in another town and Anita couldn't even read. But when they came here, Anita's teacher "put her at the top of the class" and also helped her develop a real knack for math. The teacher taught math "from the community." He had kids outside measuring the water levels and doing other projects. It turned Anita around and she started liking math. This teacher left last year, but he praised this teacher as really going the extra mile to help Anita, who continues to do well in school. I asked, "Are there other

teachers like this who care?" He said there were and mentioned several names, adding, "There are lots of good teachers."

I spoke with Bill again about a year later. We sat in his living room once more, this time with his daughter who was watching TV. He talked about Sam again, saying how things had improved and then deteriorated. After the advocate intervened, Sam was receiving the one-to-one tutoring for the rest of the year and was catching up. But this year because of changes in special education criteria, Sam is no longer receiving the tutoring and is falling behind again. Once again, Bill expressed his anger because things just happen at the school and he is not informed, nor does anyone have an answer for his concerns. He sees nothing to be gained in going back to the school board because of the response last time. He is looking to a nearby town for a private tutor but believes the school is shirking its responsibility. He added, "I don't have the time to tutor. The school expects me to teach but I can't even help my daughter with eighth-grade math. I only have a ninth-grade education myself." He admits that part of the problem may be at home, too—the kids seem to watch too much TV and spend a lot of time going out in the evening with friends. Bill reflects, "Maybe I'm too lenient."

We moved to the topic of the four-day school week proposal. The superintendent had just announced this proposal aimed at reducing student absenteeism due to sports travel, and it was the buzz around the community. Several community meetings were about to be held for parent input. Bill dismissed the proposal, saying that it was another example of the school looking out for itself. He felt that the proposal was more about giving teachers a four-day work week than helping students.

Finally, I asked him if he had heard about the two AOTE meetings held last fall (the October/November 1997 evening meetings). He said, "Yes, they sent me something but I was too busy to go."

Reflections and Conclusions About Community Voice

Four themes emerge from the data on community voice in Klawock: *trust, communication, understanding,* and *accountability*. A few words will be said here. A better understanding of these issues will likely come out of the comparative analysis across all of the case studies.

Trust

Trust is the basis of any successful partnership. Without trust between the school and its community, words like "community voice" and "educational partnership" become empty slogans. Trust is never a given. It is something that develops over time from actions rather than words. For example, schools must be willing to share decision-making power with community members as a sign of trust, rather than simply talking about it. A lack of trust may have been one reason why AOTE faltered in Klawock. We did not have any definitive measures to gauge the trust level, but there were signs that both sides may have harbored some mistrust as they went into the AOTE process. It was clear that many community people viewed AOTE as another "school thing" and did not trust the rhetoric about more community involvement. This concern seemed justified, since school administrators seemed reluctant to "let go of the reins" (as one facilitator expressed it) and share-decision making power with the community, which reinforced any initial mistrust. The importance of trust as a basis of partnership cannot be minimized in a process like AOTE.

Communication

The research on educational partnerships talks about the importance of frequent two-way communication between families and schools (D'Angelo & Alder, 1991; Epstein, 1995), and the case of Klawock seems to reinforce the importance of communication. In their survey responses, teachers and parents believed that school-home communication needed improvement. The communication about AOTE seemed weak and episodic. In AOTE or any other school-community partnership, communication needs to be frequent, proactive, and take place through many channels so

that people are informed about the improvement work, understand what it is all about, and are given some good reasons or incentives to become involved. In small communities where personal and family relationships are key, informal communication (especially with community leaders) is very important.

Understanding

Understanding is related to communication but goes deeper. People need to understand what partnerships are about. If our parent and teacher surveys are accurate, both school and community people still operate from very traditional role conceptions for parents and families. People need time and encouragement to learn and assimilate new roles as part of the improvement work. There can also be cultural misunderstandings as Native parents and non-Native teachers learn to work together. In writing about her experiences in the North Slope Borough, Leona Okakok (1989) talks about the misunderstanding that occurs between Inupiat parents and western educators. Native parents think that "hands-off" is letting teachers do their jobs, which in turn teachers interpret as "they don't care about their children." Okahok advises that school people need to reach out personally to Native parents and communicate that they have important, valid knowledge even if they were not very successful in school. "Bill" was certainly someone who did not feel that his input or knowledge was valued by the school.

Accountability

Who is accountable for student success? In the talk about community voice and partnership, perhaps not enough is said about shared accountability. A partnership only succeeds when blame is put aside and all parties assume responsibility for successful students. What seemed to be missing in Klawock was a recognition that "voice" is only the beginning to a partnership, and that action and accountability by all partners is what leads to student success.

These four themes can be viewed to some extent as readiness factors for community voice and AOTE. The more prevalent they are at the outset, the more a process like AOTE can achieve success by building upon a strong foundation of trust, good communication channels, understanding of new roles and cross-cultural

understanding, and a sense of shared accountability. Equally important is that a process like AOTE must encourage and support these deeper principles while teaching the more mechanical aspects of running community meetings, engaging the community, and developing action plans. This case study shows how building community voice is a lengthy and complicated process that no single reform model will likely accomplish on its own.

What the Reforms Mean for Students

Like any serious reform effort, the ultimate aim of AOTE is to have an impact on student experiences and learning. Increasing community voice is only part of the story. Community voice is a means to the end of students who are more successful academically and in life, especially in goal areas that the school and community agree are important. As we study reforming communities like Klawock, in which AOTE is neither the first nor only reform, it is important to document what has changed for students. Our case studies focus on three broad measures of students and their learning:

- Changes in academics or teaching practices signaling improvements in the quality of education, especially for underperforming students and in AOTE goal areas
- Students' own views of their learning and school experiences
- Available student outcome data

Efforts to Improve Student Learning and Concerns That Remain

Based on our "mapping reform" exercise discussed earlier, Klawock's recent history is marked by some serious efforts to change teaching practice and improve learning for students. These efforts include:

- The Real Communications units for freshman and sophomores that stress building real-world communication skills rather than a traditional high-school English curriculum (see Exhibit 2 in Appendix A)
- The Native Arts program which includes hands-on learning of Tlingit culture and important traditions (see Exhibit 3 in Appendix A)

- Efforts by individual teachers to integrate Native culture into the curriculum, including an Archeology Week to study local subsistence culture, a high-school science unit on salmon that includes hatchery visits and hands-on activities, and a Tlingit Language Forum that conducts evening Native language classes for families.
- A movement from "pull-out" special education to an inclusion model. While this two-year effort has experienced implementation problems – with regular teachers feeling unprepared to deal with special-needs students in the regular classroom – inclusion is beginning to take at least with the elementary teachers. It is resulting in more collaboration across the elementary faculty.
- Efforts to develop an aligned curriculum with clearly articulated teaching objectives across grades K–12 in language arts and mathematics. The alignment is motivated by Alaska's new academic content standards and graduation exit exam and includes significant staff development time supported by Goals 2000 funds.

While Klawock is working through such efforts to improve student learning, parents, staff, and students felt that further improvements are needed. Efforts have been made to set tougher graduation and course standards and some of the students in the focus groups noticed this change. Still, some people complained that students are promoted through the grades whether or not they master the appropriate content. Some people also felt that the vocational or school-to-work program was not strong enough for students who are not likely to attend college. At the same time, some college-bound students felt a lack of good quality, advanced course offerings. Finally, there were concerns about sports vs. academics (as discussed earlier) and the lost class time and disruptions caused by frequent athletic travel to games and tournaments off the island.

In summary, there were both positive accomplishments and some recognized challenges to improving student learning in Klawock. Many commented that the school's academic and behavioral climate had turned around several years ago when Tim (now the superintendent) took over as principal. This was the impetus for some positive changes, including a push for a stronger reading program in the elementary grades. Nevertheless, there was little evidence of significant schoolwide changes resulting from the original Strategic Plan of Service or any of its spin-offs, including AOTE (which, as clearly documented by now, was not well implemented in the first place). The small positive

changes that were occurring seemed to be motivated by a number of forces (some mandated and some voluntary) and, while potentially beneficial to students, they seemed unconnected to any compelling school improvement purpose or direction. The reforms were fragmented and not likely to have a strong *schoolwide* impact on students.

How Students View School Life and Their Learning Experiences

Perhaps what matters more than the reform activities is how students experience what the adults are doing in their behalf to improve school and learning. We tried to capture the student voice and viewpoint through focus groups, a survey, and observations. The students I talked to in three different focus groups (primarily middle and high-school students) were picking up on efforts by their teachers to develop classes that were more engaging, hands-on, and concerned with real-world problems. Yet an equally strong view was that many classes still were very "boring" and "traditional," with teachers giving recitations from textbooks rather than engaging lessons. High-school students were a little more positive about the quality of their classes than to middle-school students. What nearly all students agreed on, however, was that the school provided tight-knit and positive relationships between teachers and students in the friendly, small-town atmosphere of Klawock. Most students felt that teachers cared about them and their academic progress.

These findings from conversations with students were consistent with a Quality of School Life (QSL) survey administered to all middle and high-school students in spring 1998 for our study. The QSL assessed student attitudes about their courses, their learning experiences, their teachers, and the school in general. This validated instrument measures three dimensions of quality of school life: *commitment to classwork,* or the extent to which students view their classes as engaging, important, and useful; *reactions to teachers,* covering student-teacher relationships including issues like teachers listening to students and respecting their opinions; and *satisfaction with school,* or general feelings of attachment to the school (see Epstein & McPartland, 1977; the QSL questionnaire is presented in Appendix B). We did not have baseline QSL data to compare with current student responses. Our intention was only to describe what students think about school

and learning in the midst of Klawock's recent efforts to improve its academic program. The case study team's analysis of the results yielded several important findings.

First, students had more favorable attitudes towards their teachers than their classwork. Two-thirds of the students said they like their teachers. Overall, most students believed teachers listen to them (84%), let them ask questions (75%), and respect their opinions (70%). In contrast, *commitment to classwork* showed a lower scale score and lower than hoped-for scores on some specific items. For example, half or more of the students said they "count the minutes until class ends" (59%) or feel they "hardly do anything exciting in class" (48%). The pattern of results showed that students believe *what* they learn is important but see room for improvement in *how* they learn.

A second important finding was that some students were very satisfied with school and others quite dissatisfied. The *satisfaction with school* score showed a bi-modal pattern in which as many students had low scores as high scores. Some of this difference was explained by comparing middle and high-school students. Middle-school students scored lower on satisfaction with both school and teachers to a statistically significant degree. This difference is illustrated by two specific items about students' sense of connection to the school and teachers, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. A sizeable number of middle-school students seem alienated from school and their teachers, and to a lesser extent, their coursework. One factor operating in Klawock to help explain this result is that the middle school is somewhat isolated in several portable classrooms outside of the main school building.

A final noteworthy finding was the disagreement about whether students feel they have a voice in school improvement. About one-third of students agreed they had a voice and about one-third disagreed, showing the same polarized pattern as satisfaction with school. (In this case, however, there were no significant differences between middle and high-school students.) Many middle and high-school students felt excluded, even though AOTE is a process designed to involve students as important stakeholders in school improvement.

Table 1
Middle and High School Students' Feelings of Connection to the School

The school and I are like . . .	Middle School (n = 41)	High School (n = 38)	Total (n = 79)
"Good Friends"	19.5%	13.2%	16.5%
"Friends"	22.0%	57.9%	38.2%
"Distant Relatives"	34.1%	18.4%	26.6%
"Strangers"	9.8%	2.6%	6.3%
"Enemies"	14.6%	7.9%	11.4%

Table 2
Middle and High School Students' Feelings of Connection to Teachers

This term my teachers and I are . . .	Middle School (n = 41)	High School (n = 38)	Total (n = 79)
"On the same wavelength"	14.6%	38.5%	26.3%
"On the same planet"	36.6%	43.6%	40.0%
"Somewhere in the same solar system"	36.6%	15.4%	26.3%
"In two different worlds"	12.2%	2.6%	7.5%

Finally, a small shadow study was conducted of five randomly selected high-school students in which a teacher or parent case study team member "shadowed" a student for an entire school day. These observations showed students to be generally engaged in their school work, although it really depended on which classes they were in. These and other observations seemed to confirm what the students themselves were saying: some classes are more engaging, more challenging, and demand more student thinking than others.

From the data on student views, we see a mixed picture of student learning and experiences in school. There is both good news and bad news from the student point of

view. A sizeable number of students (especially in the middle school) lack a commitment to school, teachers, and coursework. A caution is that without baseline data, we do not know how attitudes have changed through the course of educational reforms.

Student Achievement and Dropout Data

Finally, student achievement data were available from statewide standardized tests over an eight-year period to provide a picture of how test scores have changed. Standardized test scores (the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in early years and the California Achievement Test more recently) only provide a narrow window by which to judge student learning and performance. This should not be the only measure of student success, but it is a valid indicator of whether student learning has improved in some of the cognitive and communication areas alluded to in Klawock's original "exit outcomes" and mission statement and in some of Alaska's new academic standards.

There is one statistical problem with the test scores in a small school like Klawock. The annual grade-level scores are based on small samples of students (probably 10 to 20 students per testing) and consequently the scores can fluctuate from year to year based on the performance of only one or two students. On the other hand, over a period of many years one would hope to see some forward trend in the test scores if schoolwide improvement is occurring. To help "smooth" the annual fluctuations and reduce the effects of small sample size, a three-year moving average was examined in addition to the annual scores for the period 1989–97. Table 3 summarizes these long-term trends, including average percentages for top- and bottom-quartile students for two time periods: 1990–93, representing a rough baseline period during which improvements like strategic planning, OBE, Successful Schools, and AOTE were either just getting underway or had not yet started; and 1994–97, representing more recent student achievement after several years of reform activity. (See Exhibit 5 in Appendix A for the complete set of student achievement data on which Table 3 is based.)

Table 3
Achievement Trends on ITBS/CAT Scores 1989–1997
(Percent Students in Top and Bottom Quartiles)

	Percent Top Quartile			Percent Bottom Quartile		
	Trend	**1990–93 Average**	**1994–97 Average**	**Trend**	**1990–93 Average**	**1994–97 Average**
Grade 4						
Reading	No Change	21.0	19.3	Improving	30.1	26.3
Math	No Change	40.5	41.3	Improving	30.1	12.9
Language Arts	Declining	38.0	19.3	Declining	26.5	38.9
Grade 8						
Reading	No Change	23.3	21.9	No Change	37.6	33.5
Math	No Change	26.3	22.8	No Change	28.9	27.6
Language Arts	Improving	18.9	27.0	Improving	39.0	33.5

Notes: The trend was determined by looking at annual scores and a three-year moving average for the period 1989–1997. In the table, "Improving" denotes an increase in top-scoring students or a decrease in bottom-scoring students, while "Declining" means the opposite. A trend of "No Change" means there were no significant improvements or declines in the moving-average trend between 1989 and 1997. Appendix A, Exhibit 4 shows the full set of achievement trend data.

The achievement trends show some areas of long-term improvement but more areas of no change or decline. Improvement seems strongest in bringing the bottom-quartile up in some areas (grade 4 reading and math, grade 8 language). On the other hand, there is a significant decline in grade 4 language arts (top quartile decreases and bottom quartile increases). This is opposite of an improving trend in grade 8 language arts. Of the 12 sets of scores, six show a pattern of no change between 1989 and 1997.

The last piece of student information was school dropout rates for students in grades 7–12. In 1996–97, the dropout rate in Klawock was 4.5%, compared to a statewide average of 3.6%. The 1996–97 rate was the 12th highest of 55 Alaska districts. This was down slightly from the 1995–96 rate of 5.2% (statewide = 4.1%). Klawock has a slightly higher rate than the state but also an improving trend, at least over the past two years.

Conclusions: What We Can Learn From Klawock

Participating in the AOTE process did not bring more clarity to an already crowded reform agenda in Klawock. AOTE was perceived as more of the same by teachers and community members who had seen a lot of "reform" over the past five years but not much change in teaching or student learning as a result. Some good things were happening in classrooms and some teachers were changing their practice, which students took notice of. However, AOTE was not able to bring a more systemic approach to improving student learning. Change continues to be incremental rather than systemic in Klawock.

As the title of this case implies, AOTE began with well-intentioned people and a seemingly strong desire to involve the community in education, yet in the end the implementation of AOTE was weak and it seemed that neither the school nor community wanted to significantly change their roles and relationships. This is a case of learning from what didn't happen and discovering some of the barriers to achieving a successful school/community partnership. The central message is that good intentions are not enough.

The appeal of AOTE in Klawock was to increase "community involvement," but this came to be understood and practiced as "community endorsement" rather than a genuine sharing of power and the reform agenda with the community. It is important that school leaders understand the distinction between community members providing input, as in many strategic planning models, and engaging in shared decision making. The crux of community voice is the willingness to share decision-making power across the school board, central office, school administrators, teachers, and community members. If school leaders are unwilling to do this, a process like AOTE may only lead to frustration and more resentment in rural Alaska communities.

People tend to see community voice and involvement as an easy solution. Klawock reminds us that increasing community voice is more than a mechanical, step-by-step process. The underlying dynamics of trust, communication, understanding, and accountability within a community must be part of the equation. Trust is the basis of any partnership, and frequent two-way communication is what keeps the partnership going. People need to understand that a partnership means new roles and responsibilities for everyone: in other words, change rather than more of the same. Cross-cultural understanding between Native people and non-Native educators also needs to be nurtured, and any cultural misunderstandings that can damage trust need to be brought out and dealt with. Finally, fault-finding needs to be replaced with a relentless pursuit of student results and a shared accountability among teachers, parents, and students to achieve goals that the community values. Beyond the mechanical steps of AOTE (forming leadership teams, running community meetings, developing action plans), some dialogue about these deeper issues should be built into the school improvement process. People need time and a structure to talk about these issues in a safe and productive way. The conversation should include the strengths of a particular community that can be tapped into and the barriers that must be overcome to achieve more trust, better communication, an understanding of the change process and different points of view, and shared accountability. Trainers, facilitators, and other change agents need to keep an eye on these issues and be ready with some helpful intervention strategies throughout the entire improvement process.

Parents and other community members may not always want more voice. They may be satisfied enough so as to not find the time and put forth the effort. They may also believe that parents and the school always have been, and therefore always should be, separate rather than overlapping spheres of influence. Finally, they may be so unfamiliar or uncomfortable with new parent roles like "parent volunteer" and "parent decision maker" that changing old behaviors is difficult, even when the desire is there. AOTE and similar processes seeking more community voice should not assume that all parents and community members want to be involved in the same ways. Yet all parents are motivated by the successes or failures of their own children in school. Bringing parents into the larger educational process (i.e., beyond their concerns for their own children) may require convincing parents that when all children are successful, the whole community prospers and *their* children benefit even more.

Parents and community members do not always know how they are supposed to have a voice unless the school lays out some clear options and communicates these choices. More is required than general invitations, although the tone of the outreach must make parents feel welcome and communicate that their knowledge as non-educators or as Native parents is important. AOTE may place too much emphasis on community meetings as the major expression of community voice. Meetings are problematic because of time, scheduling, and perhaps their public nature. Parents may need other mechanisms such as a parent center in the school or a "parent/community involvement coordinator" who is a phone call away and can provide information about involvement options as well as encouragement. More than community meetings are needed for parents to become fully engaged in their children's education as decision makers, volunteers, and ultimately partners.

AOTE was weakly implemented during the two-year effort, and no one would expect dramatic student results. If one considers the longer-term "strategic planning" reforms that AOTE was part of, Klawock again demonstrates that fragmented, programmatic reform—without the buy-in of teachers and community—leads to equally fragmented results for children. From what students told us and from the limited student data, there were some positive accomplishments that Klawock should be proud of. These were balanced, however, by areas where improvement had not yet happened or where test

results were unchanging or negative. Klawock had not yet achieved the ideal of all students succeeding and will likely not do so with its program-by-program approach. AOTE should be a force not only for more community voice but for helping districts and schools integrate the reforms they already have. The positive momentum of a direction-setting process that produces community-valued student goals is quickly lost when a school is then confronted with a confusing web of mandates, programs, improvement committees, and teacher-led innovations that are already ongoing. Rather than adding yet another action plan for improvement, schools and districts need tools to figure out how to simplify so that more attention is given to achieving student results and less to "reform activities" that are often draining and unproductive.

Klawock should be commended for the efforts of dedicated educators and a caring community who want students to succeed. I have tried to present some of the positive academic accomplishments, which should not be minimized in thinking about how Klawock is working to improve. In regard to AOTE, it is important to recognize that leadership changes, and the different leadership styles of the two superintendents made AOTE more difficult to implement. Klawock faces yet another superintendent change, so there is an opportunity for renewal and perhaps learning a few things from past experiences with school reform and community voice. Continuous improvement means a future focus and another opportunity to always make things better for students. The spirit of this case study is to provide an honest picture of the two-year AOTE reform effort so that Klawock and other similar communities can learn and continue to improve.

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Appendix A

Exhibits

Exhibit 1
Klawock City School District Mission, Beliefs , and Student Learning Goals
(Developed and Adopted 1991-93)

Mission

"Employing all resources, the Klawock City School District and Community will produce responsible students by offering innovative, diverse, and traditional learning experiences that advance every student's unique skills and talents, enabling each of them to become a productive member of society."

Beliefs

The Klawock City School District believes that…

- for learning and understanding to take place the individual must be actively engaged
- quality education challenges the individual by setting and expecting high standards of performance for all learners
- quality education is the cooperative responsibility of our entire community
- quality education is a nurturing process for all participants
- well educated students are prepared to live independently in Klawock as well as in any community of their choice
- quality education requires an understanding of our own culture and respect for other cultures
- quality education guides students toward high moral, ethical, and social behavior
- quality education provides information to enable students to make wise choices and to understand the effects on the person, the unborn, and the community

Student Learning Goals (Exit Outcomes)

All students who graduate from Klawock City School District will be able to demonstrate their ability to:

- Be a self-directed learner
- Know and use the cognitive skills necessary to pursue their personal goals and use throughout life
- Be an effective communicator
- Be a quality and innovative producer
- Be an involved citizen
- Be a collaborative worker

Exhibit 2
"Real Communications" Background & Vignette

Background. Jack is a 40-something English teacher with a graying beard, dark eyes, a strong voice, a joking manner, and a little bit of the old basketball coach left in him. He has been at the school for 12 years, during most of which there was the very traditional high-school English I, I, III, IV in which students read great literature. But the kids were bored and so was Jack! With the encouragement of the superintendent and the help of three other teachers, Jack developed Real Communications (RC I and II) for freshmen and sophomores about three or four years ago. The RC units are designed to engage kids and focus on skills and performances that all kids need: speaking, for one. Jack used to think that only writing was important, but if students can develop confidence in their speaking and develop ideas this way, they will be better writers. RC I teaches the basics of speaking, involves the reading of engaging literature, and writing. RC II "spirals" (a metaphor Jack uses from his days of basketball drills) what is learned in RC I and takes these skills to a higher level. Once they finish RC I and II, the students (as juniors and seniors) can choose college-prep coursework, journalism, or drama.

RC II Class. It's 9 a.m. and eight students drift in, dressed in jeans, baggy sweatshirts, and jackets. They joke around with Jack and he teases them back. The large whiteboard in front of the room is crammed full of words like "supplication," "moniker," and "catholic." To start, students are asked to use these words in well- constructed sentences. They struggle with some of the words, but Jack pushes them to use the word in a clean, concise sentence that is not too wordy. Jack talks about President Clinton's State of the Union address last night and gets off on a little speech of his own about the President's education message: "That education is important is a catholic idea," explaining that catholic with a small 'c' means universal or widespread rather than religious. Students and teacher define words and use them in discussions of real things, and Jack does not let students off the hook when they start with, "I don't know." Every student gets a turn and they are all engaged.

The short vocabulary review is over in about 15 minutes , and Jack starts cutting up some strips from a piece of paper which he passes out along with large index cards, talking non-stop while he does this. The students have three minutes to look at the topic on the strip of paper and quickly jot down a "hook" to open with, two or three main points, and a "snapper" to close, if they like, for their unrehearsed speech. He reminds them that in impromptu speaking, "The art of concentration is thinking of nothing at all and letting your mind work." Students take turns giving their one-minute speeches. One student talks about My Ideal Date: after some well-chosen words about flowers, a romantic Italian restaurant, and fettuccini alfredo, the sophomore turns to his date at the end of the evening and says, "So how do you like the view from my '83 station wagon?" Jack laughs at this snapper and says "good job." Not all of the students are so inventive. Some struggle to read the words aloud that they have written down on their index cards. Jack gives encouraging words and constructive criticism to all of his students.

Exhibit 3
The Klawock Native Arts Program

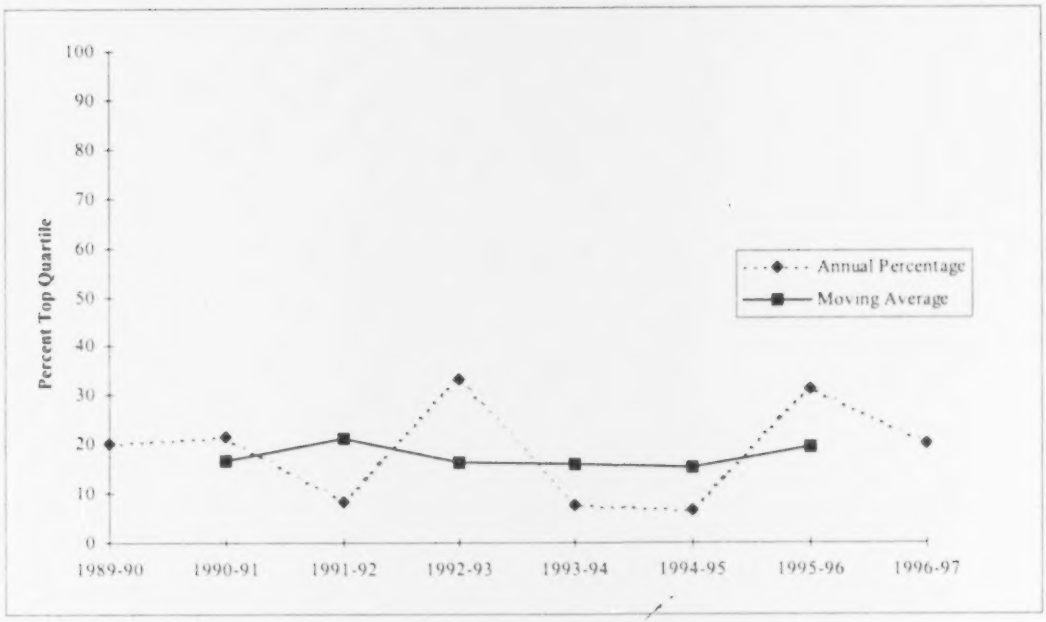
Take a short walk outside of the Klawock elementary school towards the post office, and you'll see a good-sized building that serves as the studio for the current Native Arts Program, a partnership between the school district, city, and Native organizations. Native arts started small in the 1970s as a class taught by one of Jon Rowan's aunts back when he was a student at the school. As Jon grew up and became a janitor in the school, the program faded away. Jon, with his knowledge of traditional totems and masks and his carving talents, was encouraged by many people to revitalize Native arts. With support from Indian Education funds and the City of Klawock (which contributes funds in return for restoration of the totem poles in the park), Jon became the new half-time Native Arts instructor in the early 1990s. The project is now funded full-time, serving all students grades K–12, and has its own donated studio. Jon is using the experience to work towards a teaching certificate. Jon also happens to be one of the AOTE facilitators. Younger students learn traditional art history and have opportunities to do hands-on projects. During my visit, I saw elementary students carving and painting replicas of traditional Tlingit canoes. A group of high-school students are working with Jon on restoring the weather-beaten totem poles in the park. Jon is a quiet man with skillful hands and an encouraging but patient manner with his students. His hope is that some of the kids he is teaching will be the future of the Native Arts Program and keep it going. The program is well regarded by students and adults throughout the community as providing an opportunity for all students to understand the community's cultural heritage, to build self-esteem, and to provide learning that is interesting and fun.

Exhibit 4
AOTE Training Process and Workshops

FIRST YEAR OF AOTE	
SET DIRECTIONS (Workshop 1)	Community meetings #1, 2, & 3 input to ↓ District Team ↓ Board adopts • values & beliefs • student goals/outcomes • mission
SET PRIORITIES (Workshop 2)	Community meetings #4 & 5 input to ↓ District Team ↓ Board adopts priorities
BEGIN IMPROVEMENT PLANS (Workshop 3)	Community meeting #6 ↓ Ideas for the plan to go to community teams
SECOND YEAR OF AOTE	
FINISH PLANS (Workshop 4)	Community meetings #6 & 7 ↓ Community Team completes drafting the plans
IMPLEMENT & MONITOR PLANS (Workshop 5)	Community meeting #8 input to ↓ Community Team & District Team Monitor implementation of plans Report to Board
RENEW & PLAN FOR THE FUTURE (Workshop 6)	Community meeting #9 ↓ Celebrations & needs to keep AOTE going & growing District Team/Community Teams/Board

Exhibit 5
Student Achievement Trend Data 1989–1997
(Percent of Students in Top/Bottom Quartile on State Tests)

Grade 4 Reading



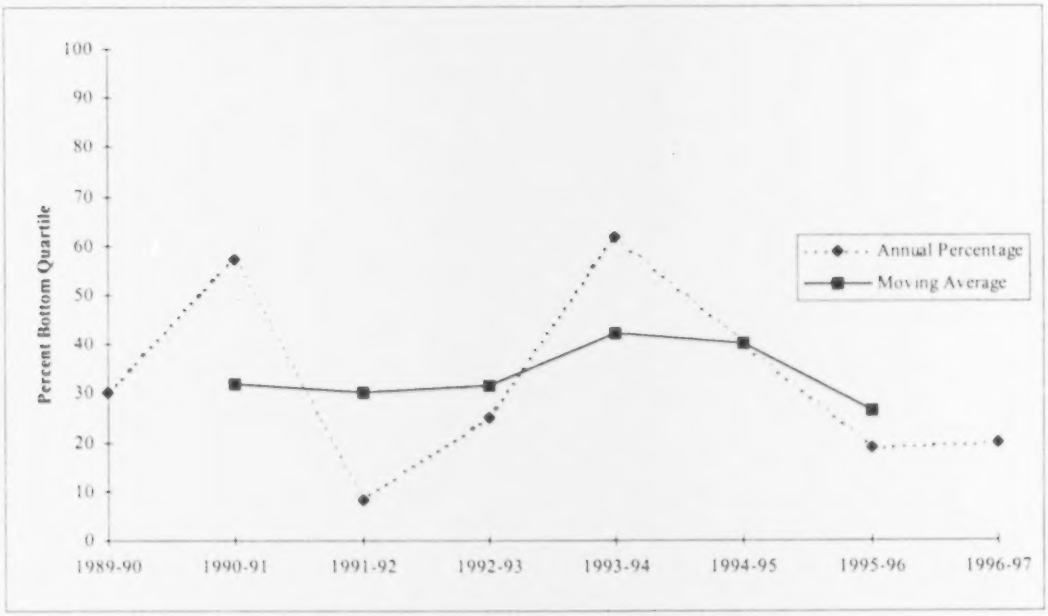
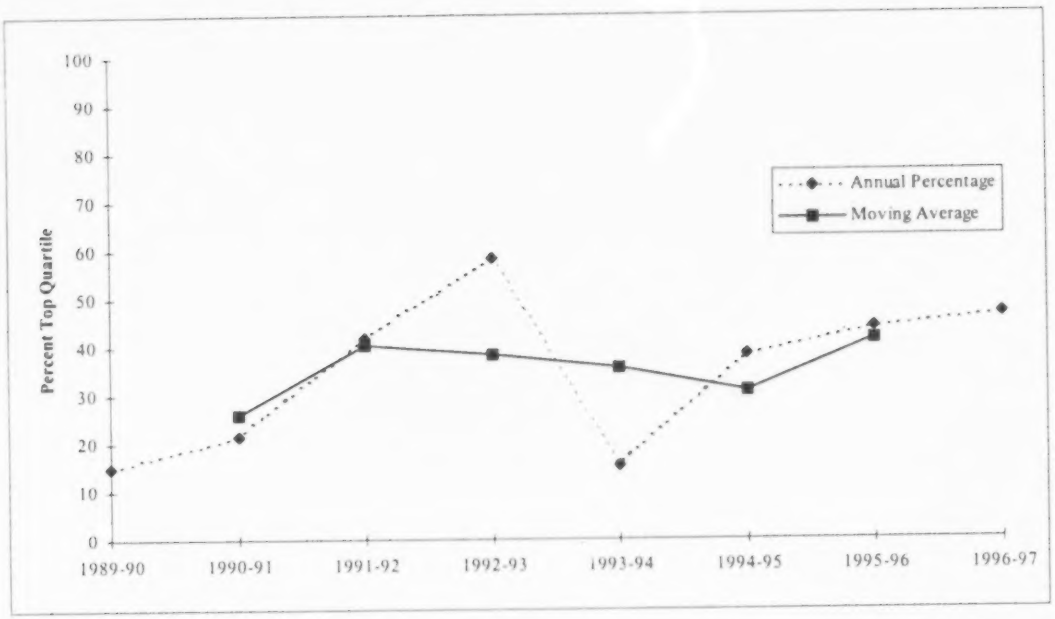


Exhibit 5, continued

Grade 4 Math



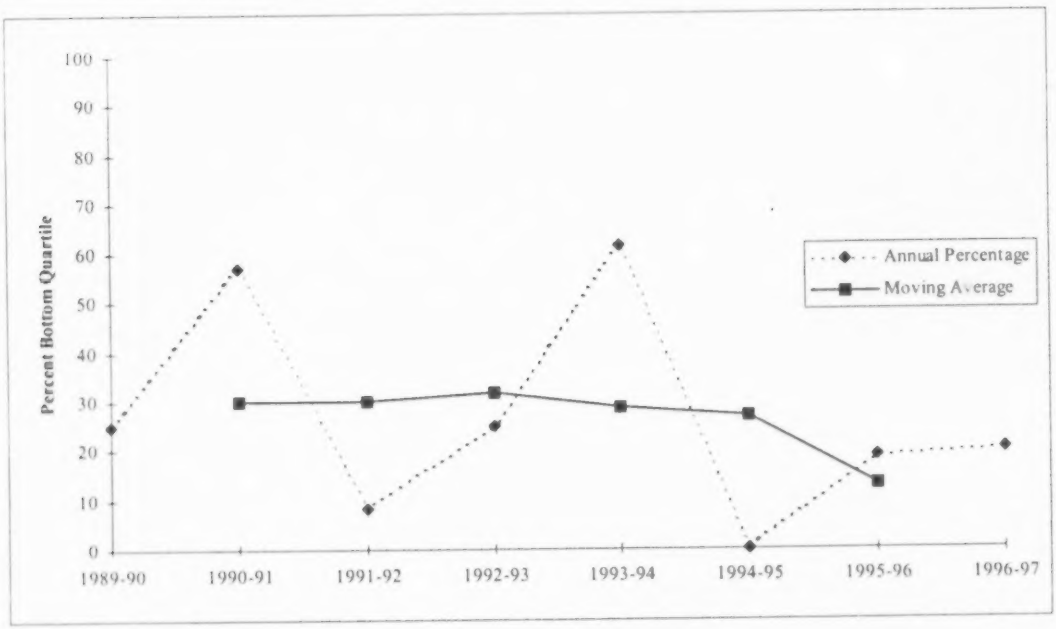


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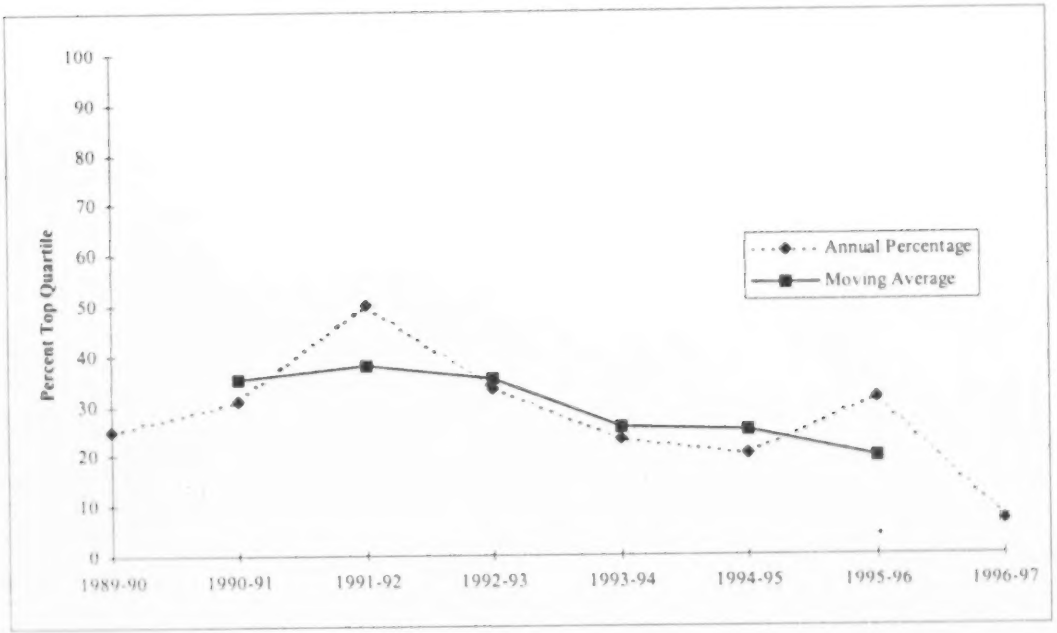
Exhibit 5, continued

Grade 4 Language Arts



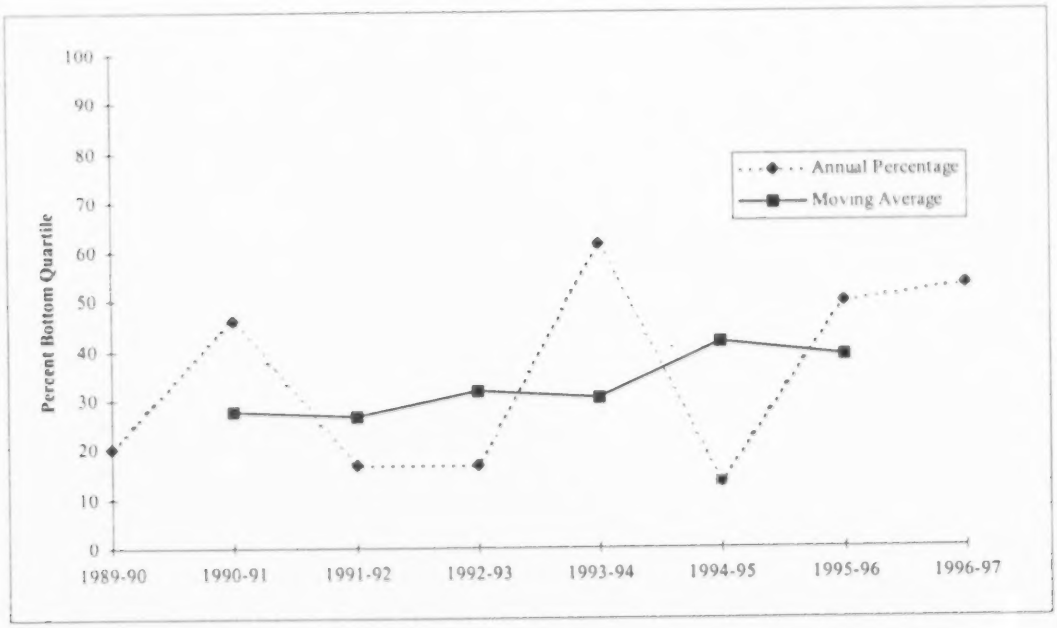
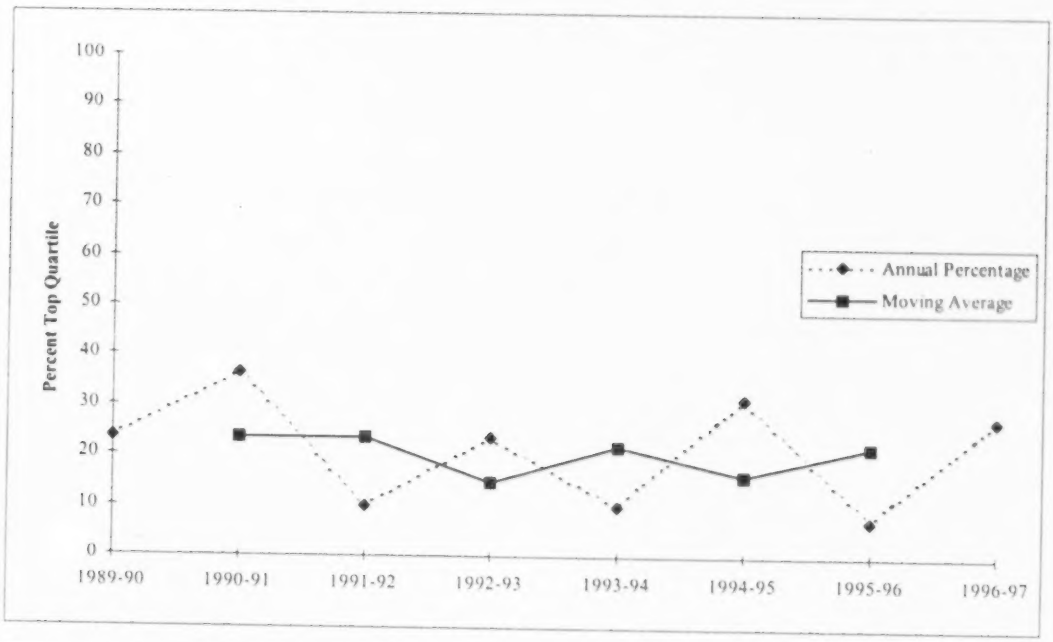


Exhibit 5, continued

Grade 8 Reading



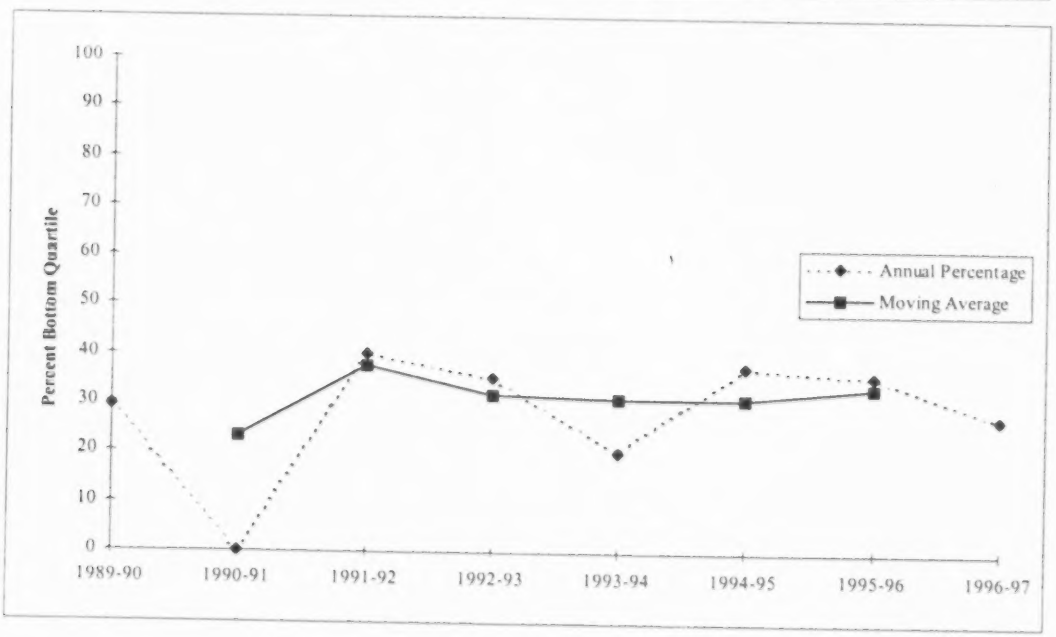


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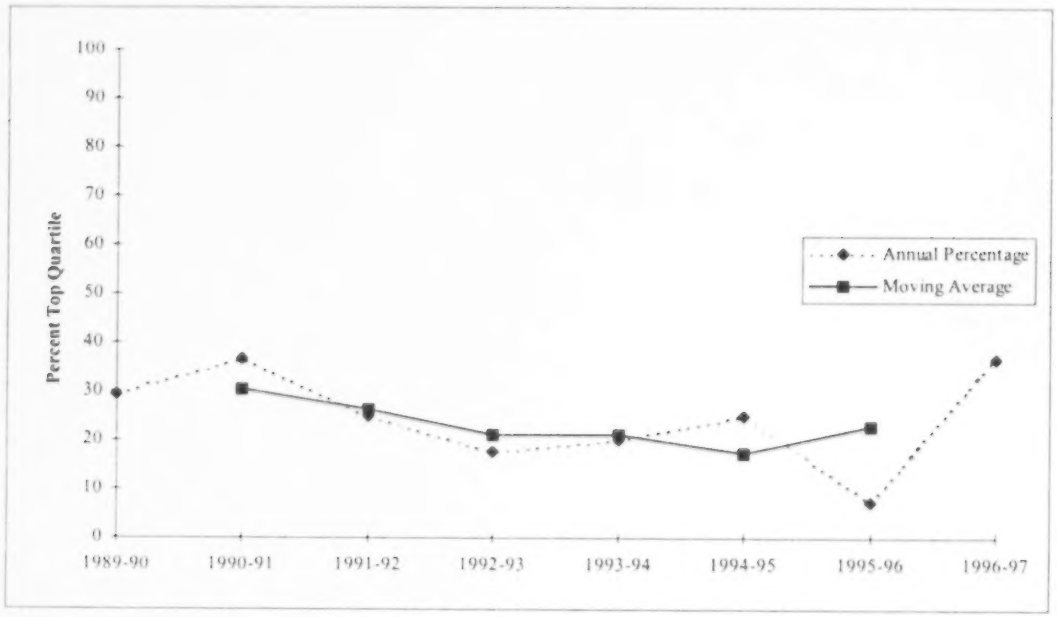
Exhibit 5, continued

Grade 8 Math



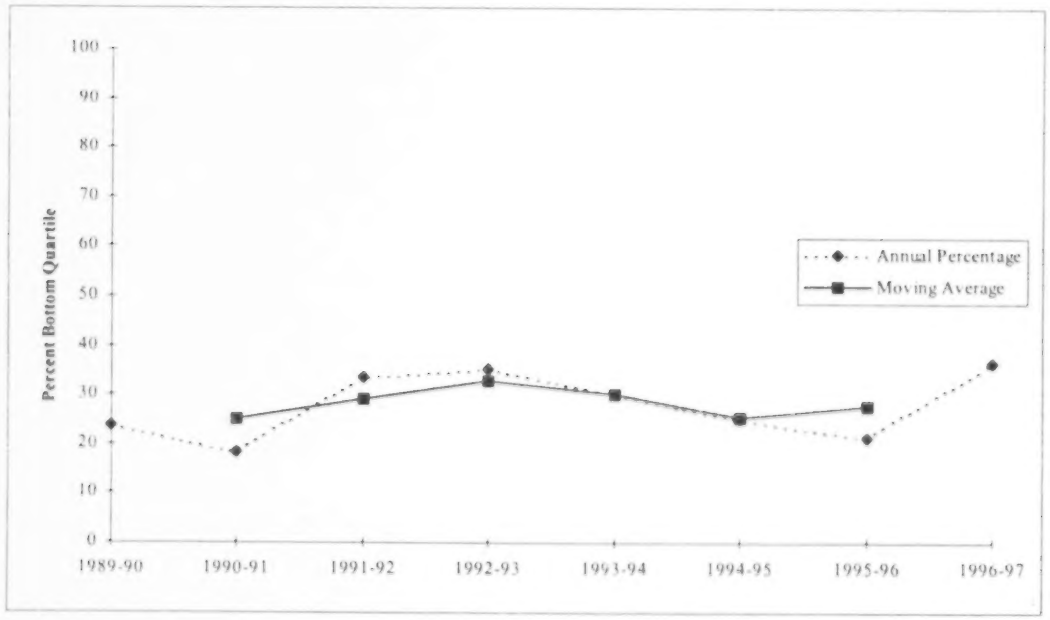
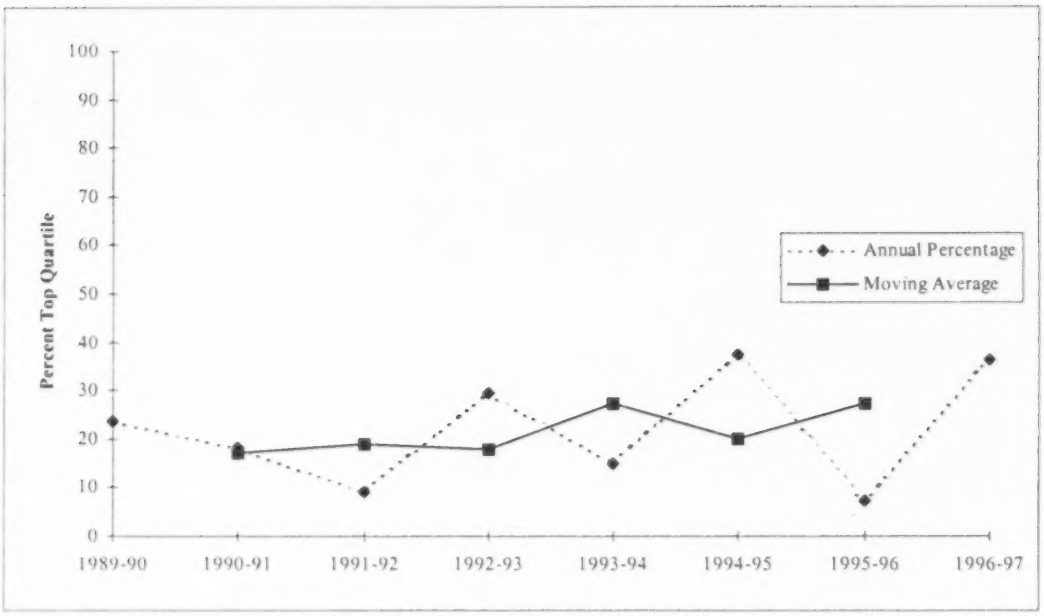
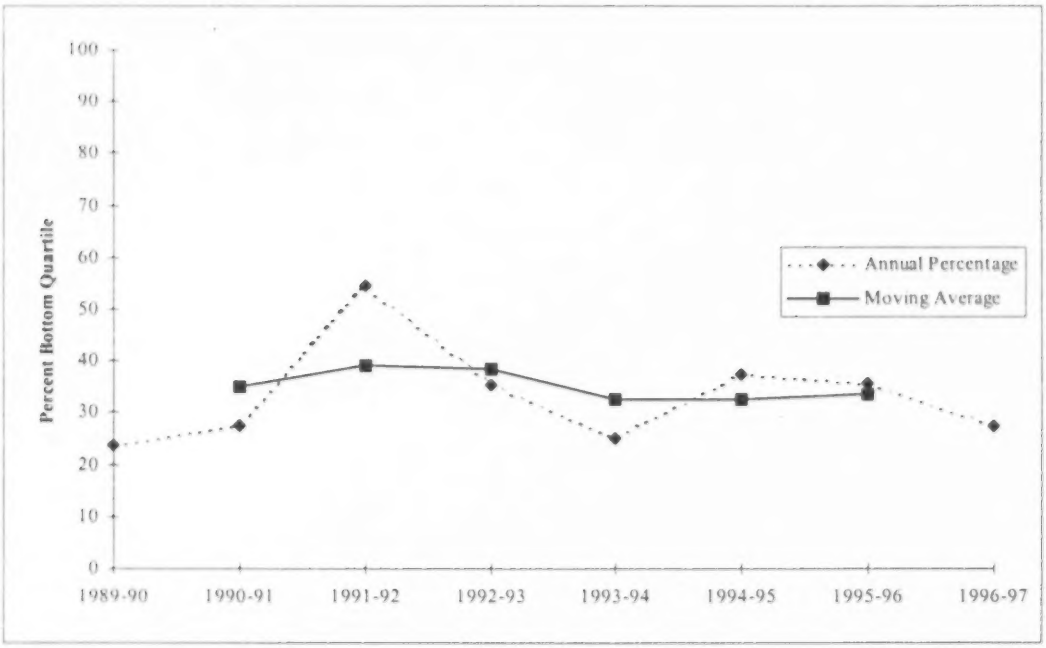


Exhibit 5, continued

Grade 8 Language Arts





Notes on all charts: The Iowa Test of Basic Skills was used 1989–90 through 1994–95. The California Achievement Test was used 1995–96 through 1996–97. Because student sample sizes are small and annual fluctuations large, a three-year moving average (including the present year, the year before, and the year after) is included to help detect trends.

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Appendix B

Case Study Methods and Survey Instruments

Case Study Methods and Data Sources

Our case study team used open-ended interviews, focus groups, surveys, observations, and the collection and analysis of documents. As senior researcher, I performed most of the interviews, administered the survey to students, observed in classrooms and around the school, and collected and analyzed documents. I spent approximately 10 days on site across three visits during different times of the school year. Other case study team members performed structured interviews with AOTE meeting attendees and observed and took notes at the meetings, administered the parent and teacher questionnaires, and performed the student shadow studies. We worked collaboratively in things like designing survey questions and examining and interpreting the results. The key data sources are outlined below.

Interviews

A total of 58 interviews were conducted, including

- multiple interviews with the superintendents and principals (there was a change in both superintendent and principal during the course of the study)
- 14 teacher interviews
- 15 interviews with parents or other community members
- 24 student interviews in four different focus groups
- multiple interviews with the AOTE facilitators
- 2 school board member interviews
- 1 classified staff interview

Surveys

- parent involvement survey for parents (included in this Appendix)
- parent involvement survey for teachers (included in this Appendix)
- Student Quality of School Life Survey plus questions from a previous Klawock student survey (included in this Appendix)

Observations

- 10 unstructured classroom observations
- one-day shadow studies of five randomly selected high-school students
- 2 faculty meeting observations
- informal observations around the school and in the community

Key Documents

- various grant proposals and program descriptions
- curriculum documents, student report card
- two-plus years of school board meeting minutes
- two years of the school newsletter/school newspaper
- district report cards to the public
- state of Alaska report cards to the public
- student achievement data
- Klawock's "Strategic Plan of Service"
- AOTE meeting notes
- community newspapers

Parent Involvement: What Do Parents Think?

An important issue related to our district's Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) process is *parent involvement in education*. We hope to increase parent and community involvement through AOTE. Interviews by our research team with participants at the last AOTE community meeting identified a lack of parent and community involvement as an important concern. To help us better understand this issue, we are asking parents to share their views about parent involvement. Please take a few minutes to share your thoughts via this brief questionnaire. **Individual responses will be kept confidential**.

1. Parents can be involved in school and their child's education in many ways. Please consider each area below and rate how important each area is for *you personally* as a parent. Use the 1 to 3 scale below.

   3 = very important
   2 = somewhat important
   1 = not very important

   ___ Attend special parent activities organized by the school or PTSA
   ___ Attend parent training classes that help parents support their child's learning
   ___ Attend teacher/parent conferences
   ___ Spend time helping in your child's classroom
   ___ Spend time helping with school events
   ___ Monitor your child's school work and homework
   ___ Work with your child at home on school-related projects
   ___ Read to your child or encourage him/her to read
   ___ Be involved in school decision making
   ___ Attend Alaska Onward to Excellence meetings to provide input on school improvement
   ___ Understand and support the mission and goals of the school
   ___ Understand and support the school's educational program
   ___ Other important areas of involvement for me *(briefly describe)*:
   _____

2. Are there specific ways you would like to be more involved as a parent? Please list below using items from Question 1 if you like.

   1. _____
   2. _____
   3. _____

3. My current level of involvement in the school is:

   ___ About right–I am involved as much as I would like to be
   ___ Not enough–I wish I could be more involved

4. Are there factors that prevent you from becoming more involved? Consider the list below and check all that apply.

___ Schedule conflicts between school and work or other important activities
___ Unavailability of child care for young children at home
___ I don't know who to talk to or where to go in the school to get involved
___ I don't know what my options are
___ I don't feel very comfortable coming to the school
___ I don't think the school is really interested in my involvement
___ Other *(briefly describe)*: _____

5. What are the best times for you to participate in school or classroom activities?

_____

6. Are there things that the school or teachers should be doing to encourage more parent involvement? Please list up to three things that the school or teachers should do, including specific activities.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

7. How should <u>teachers</u> help and support <u>parents</u> in order to help students succeed?

8. How should <u>parents</u> help and support <u>teachers</u> in order to help students succeed?

9. Demographic information (optional): This will help us compare how different groups of parents feel.

Ethnicity:

___ Alaska Native
___ White
___ Mixed race
___ Other:
_____

Household type:

___ Two-parent household, both work
___ Two-parent household, at least one does not work
___ Single working parent
___ Single non-working parent
___ Other: _____

Number of children in school: _____

What grades are they in? _____

Additional comments:

Thank You! Your responses will help our school's continuing improvement efforts.

Parent Involvement: What Do Teachers Think?

An important issue related to our district's Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) process is *parent involvement in education*. We hope to increase parent and community involvement through AOTE. Interviews by our research team with participants at the last AOTE community meeting identified a lack of parent and community involvement as an important concern. To help us better understand this issue, we are asking teachers to share their views about parent involvement. Please take a few minutes to share your thoughts via this brief questionnaire. **Individual responses will be kept confidential**.

1. Parents can be involved in school and their child's education in many ways. Please consider each parent involvement area below and rate each area in terms of its *importance in supporting your work as a teacher*. Use the 1 to 3 scale below.

   3 = very important
   2 = somewhat important
   1 = not very important

   Parents who:

   ___ Attend special parent activities organized by the school or PTSA
   ___ Attend parent training classes that help parents support their child's learning
   ___ Attend teacher/parent conferences
   ___ Spend time helping in the classroom
   ___ Spend time helping with school events
   ___ Monitor their child's school work and homework
   ___ Work with their child at home on school-related projects
   ___ Read to their child or encourage him/her to read
   ___ Are involved in school decision making
   ___ Attend Alaska Onward to Excellence meetings to provide input on school improvement
   ___ Understand and support the mission and goals of the school
   ___ Understand and support the school's educational program
   ___ Other important areas of parent involvement to support my teaching *(briefly describe)*:

   _____

2. Are there specific areas where you would like to see more parent involvement? Please list below using items from Question 1 if you like.

   1. _____
   2. _____
   3. _____

3. The current level of parent involvement in the school is:

   ___ About right–parents are involved as much as they should be
   ___ Not enough–parents should be more involved

4. Are there factors that prevent parents from becoming more involved? Consider the list below and check all that apply.

___ Schedule conflicts between school and parents' work or other important activities
___ Unavailability of child care for young children at home
___ Parents don't know who to talk to or where to go in the school to get involved
___ Parents don't know what their options are
___ Parents don't feel very comfortable coming to the school
___ Parents don't think the school is really interested in their involvement
___ Other *(briefly describe):* _____

5. Are there things that the school or teachers should be doing to encourage more parent involvement? Please list up to three things that the school or teachers should do, including specific ways that parents might become more involved in your classroom or other school activities

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

6. How should <u>teachers</u> help and support <u>parents</u> in order to help students succeed?

7. How should <u>parents</u> help and support <u>teachers</u> in order to help students succeed?

Thank You! Your responses will be help our school's continuing improvement efforts.

Klawock Student Survey

This year's student survey includes questions written by the Klawock staff plus some new questions called the Quality of School Life survey. Your answers to all of the questions will help provide direction to school staff for improvement at Klawock School.

Read each question carefully then mark one answer that is closest to what you think. Remember–**this is not a test**. There are not right or wrong answers. Please work on your own. It is important to tell us what YOU really think. **Do not put your name on the survey**, but please indicate your grade and whether you are male or female.

Grade: _____

____ Male
____ Female

		Definitely No		Average/ OK		Definitely Yes
1.	**My classes are interesting.**	1	2	3	4	5
2.	**Teachers are well prepared for classes.**	1	2	3	4	5
3.	**Teachers are available to help when needed.**	1	2	3	4	5
4.	**There is an adequate number of courses offered.**	1	2	3	4	5
5.	**After school activities are appropriate.**	1	2	3	4	5
6.	**The physical condition and care of our building is good.**	1	2	3	4	5
7.	**The quality of technology in the school is good.**	1	2	3	4	5
8.	**The library is adequate for research and reading needs.**	1	2	3	4	5
9.	**The food service selection and quality are good.**	1	2	3	4	5
10.	**I feel like I have a voice in improving the school.**	1	2	3	4	5

Quality of School Life

Circle **T** or **F** if the following statements are TRUE or FALSE for **YOU**.

1.	T	F	**In class, I often count the minutes till it ends.**
2.	T	F	**I wish I could have the same teachers next year.**
3.	T	F	**Most of the time I do not want to go to school.**
4.	T	F	**Most of my teachers want me to do things their way and not my own way.**
5.	T	F	**I hardly ever do anything very exciting in class.**
6.	T	F	**My teachers often act as if they are always right and I am wrong.**
7.	T	F	**I am very happy when I am in school.**
8.	T	F	**Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say.**
9.	T	F	**I daydream a lot in class.**
10.	T	F	**Certain students in my classes are favored by my teachers more than the rest.**
11.	T	F	**I like school very much.**
12.	T	F	**Teachers here have a way with students that makes me like them.**
13.	T	F	**Most of the topics we study in class can't end soon enough to suit me.**
14.	T	F	**Most of my teachers do not like me to ask a lot of questions during a lesson.**

Check **one** answer that tells best what **YOU** think.

15. This term I am eager to get to . . .

_____ 1. all my classes.
_____ 2. most of my classes.
_____ 3. about half my classes.
_____ 4. one or two classes.
_____ 5. none of my classes.

16. How would you rate the ability of most of <u>your</u> teachers compared to teachers in other schools at your grade level? My teachers are . . .

_____ 1. far above average.
_____ 2. above average.
_____ 3. average.
_____ 4. below average.
_____ 5. far below average.

17. **In my classes I get so interested in an assignment or project that I don't want to stop work.**

_____ 1. Never.
_____ 2. Hardly ever.
_____ 3. Quite often.
_____ 4. Every day.

18. **Thinking of my teachers this term, I really like . . .**

_____ 1. all of them.
_____ 2. most of them.
_____ 3. half of them.
_____ 4. one or two of them.
_____ 5. none of them.

19. **The school and I are like . . .**

_____ 1. good friends.
_____ 2. friends.
_____ 3. distant relatives.
_____ 4. strangers.
_____ 5. enemies.

20. **The work I do in most classes is . . .**

_____ 1. not at all important to me.
_____ 2. not too important to me.
_____ 3. pretty important to me.
_____ 4. very important to me.

21. **This term my teachers and I are . . .**

_____ 1. on the same wave length.
_____ 2. on the same planet.
_____ 3. somewhere in the same solar system.
_____ 4. in two different worlds.

22. **The things I get to work on in most of my classes are . . .**

_____ 1. great stuff–really interesting to me.
_____ 2. good stuff–pretty interesting to me.
_____ 3. OK–school work is school work.
_____ 4. dull stuff–not very interesting to me.
_____ 5. trash–a total loss for me.

23. **If you could choose to take any courses at all, how many of your <u>present</u> courses would you take?**

_____ 1. All of them.
_____ 2. More than half.
_____ 3. About half.
_____ 4. Fewer than half.
_____ 5. None of them.

Read each statement. Then check ALWAYS, OFTEN, SOMETIMES, SELDOM **or** NEVER to tell **how often** the statement is true for **YOU**.

		ALWAYS	OFTEN	SOME-TIMES	SELDOM	NEVER
24.	**I enjoy the work I do in class.**	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
25.	**Work in class is just busy work and a waste of time.**	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
26.	**I feel I can go to my teacher with the things that are on my mind.**	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
27.	**School work is dull and boring for me.**	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Now you may comment in your own words about the quality of life in school.

Some students say: "Overall, I like school." Others say: "Overall, I hate school." How do you feel and why?

What are the three best things about the school for you?

What three things would you most like to change?